

22. FOOD HABITS OF THE BAYA WEAVER *PLOCEUS PHILIPPINUS* (LINN:)

(With one plate)

The baya weaver *Ploceus philippinus* (Linn.) is known to feed on food grains, caterpillars, small insects, moths, spiders, orthopterous insects, grass and weed seeds (Ali, S. 1945, THE BIRDS OF KUTCH, pp. 42-43, OUP; Roberts, T.J. 1992, THE BIRDS OF PAKISTAN, Vol. 2, pp. 493-496, OUP). Weaverbirds are known to exploit fallen grains and raid standing crops. However, in Kerala State, southern India, George reported several baya weaver catching frogs in a rice field and eating them. (JBHNS, Vol. 70, 1973).

Harshad Pomal, a nature photographer from Bhuj, photographed (Plate 1) a baya weaver feeding on a gecko. The female carried the gecko to the nest to feed her young ones. He observed this at Khari river area near Bhuj. This appears to be a new item in the food list of the baya weaver and hence worth reporting.

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23. FOUR NEW BIRD RECORDS FOR SINDH, PAKISTAN

Ever since moving into our home in Karachi in March 1994, which is in Dhoraji adjacent to a small park, there has been a single magpie (*Pica pica*) around the park. It has occasionally not been sighted for up to a week, but has always reappeared. It tends to frequent with house crows (which sometimes mob it). About two weeks ago, I last saw the bird looking less pristine than usual, and tending to hide in bushes, and I have not seen it since — I fear it may have died. In any event, it was here for over five years. The nearest part of the species' normal range is in central Baluchistan. It is unclear if it is a genuine wild bird that strayed here, or an escape, though I am not aware of the bird being kept caged.

On May 31, 1998, while experimenting with a newly acquired adaptor on my Kowa spotting telescope, I photographed a single spotted munia (*Lonchura punctulata*) in an acacia bush in the adjacent park in Karachi (Kidney Hill Park). T.J. Roberts (1992, BIRDS OF PAKISTAN) reports the bird as being confined to northern Pakistan. To my knowledge, there is no previous record in Sindh. Tom Roberts

suggests that this could have been an escape, and that possibility cannot be excluded.

On June 28, 1998 at Gizri Creek in Karachi (between the Defence and Korangi areas) I saw and photographed a woodchat shrike (*Lanius senator*) — a bird I am familiar with from southern France. This bird was present for about 4 hours in the morning, but was not seen on subsequent visits. Roberts does not include the species in his BIRDS OF PAKISTAN, but Ali and Ripley (1996) in their PICTORIAL GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT mention an unconfirmed record from Quetta, Baluchistan. Since the species nests in Iran, it is not an entirely unexpected occurrence. Alas, Gizri creek is no longer the excellent bird habitat of old, as the creek bed has been reclaimed by filling it with sand, presumably for future buildings.

On October 18, 1998, on the Hub River, which separates Sindh and Baluchistan, about 45 km northwest of Karachi and about 2.5 km upstream from the upper tidal limit, I saw and photographed a black-capped kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*). It flew across the river several



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Fig. 1: Baya weaver *Ploceus philippinus* feeding on a gecko